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RR RUEHDE  
DE RUEHPG #1545/01 3560901  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 220901Z DEC 06  
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8391  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 0111  
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0072  
RUEHDE/IRAN RPO DUBAI 0001

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 001545

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EUR/NCE FOR ERIC FICHTE; NEA/FO FOR PDAS JEFFREY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2016

TAGS: PREL IZ IR EZ

SUBJECT: CZECHS AFFIRM SUPPORT FOR U.S. MIDDLE EAST POLICY  
DURING VISIT OF PDAS JEFFREY

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Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Mike Dodman  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary. During a visit to Prague December 10-11, NEA PDAS James F. Jeffrey met with MFA officials and members of the Czech Parliament Foreign Relations Committee to discuss Iran, recommendations of the Iraq Study Group, and Middle East issues generally. The Czechs responded favorably to Jeffrey's visit and affirmed their steadfast support of U.S. policy in the Middle East and of the efforts of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Officials at the RFE/RL headquarters in Prague briefed Jeffrey on the USG's Persian-/Farsi-language Radio Farda broadcasts into Iran.  
End summary.

¶2. (SBU) During this visit, Jeffrey thanked the Czechs for their cooperation in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon and provided a frank assessment of the threats posed by Iran and the situation in Iraq. He met separately with: MFA officials, including Deputy FM Tomas Pojar, Acting Director of the Middle East Department Pavel Rezac, Deputy Director of the Policy Planning Department Jaroslav Olsa, and future DCM to the Czech Embassy in Tehran Lukas Gjuric; members of the Czech Parliament Foreign Relations Committee, including Chairman Jan Hamacek (CSSD), former FM Cyril Svoboda (Christian Democrat), and Jan Schwippel (ODS); Jiri Schneider, Director of the Prague Security Studies Institute and former MFA political director who served as Czech Ambassador to Israel; and RFE/RL officials, including Acting President Jeff Trimble, Chief of Staff Beth Portale, and Director of Radio Farda Kaveh Basmenji.

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Iran, Iraq, and the ISG Report  
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¶3. (C) The Czechs agreed with the U.S. goal not of regime change in Tehran, but of forcing the government to change its behavior. Officials expressed support for current U.S. efforts on a Chapter 7 UNSC resolution and coordination to dismantle Iranian financial networks that fund extremist activity. (Note: the Czech government has consistently supported U.S. policies on Iran. End note.) Deputy FM Tomas Pojar expressed confidence that there will be no change in Czech policy on Iraq. He promised, too, that Czech support of USG efforts to reach out to the Iranian people through Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL's) Persian-/Farsi-language Radio Farda broadcasts, based in Prague, would continue.

¶ 4. (C) During discussions on Iraq Study Group (ISG) recommendations, Pojar initially seemed to favor the idea of dialogue with Iran and Syria, noting the United States maintained open lines of communication with the U.S.S.R. throughout the Cold War. However, following more give and take, he acceded that talks with Iran or Syria would do little to resolve the violence in Iraq.

¶ 5. (C) Pojar agreed the situation in Iraq is not linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict, but thought major improvements to general regional stability might result if even moderate progress is made in Palestine, although he was not optimistic about the prospects. He spoke about his hope for a National Unity Government that accepts the Quartet principles, and noted that ongoing Jewish settlement in the occupied territories is unhelpful.

¶ 6. (C) Pojar asked about the possibility of independence for Kurdistan. (The Czech Republic established a trade office in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2004.) Jeffrey said U.S. policy is and will continue to be that Iraq should remain united. Pojar noted the Czechs hope to open an office in Basra, similar to the one in the northern part of the country, to promote trade in the South as soon as security in that area improves.

¶ 7. (C) Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jan Hamacek doubted that dialogue with Iran on Iraq would be successful. He echoed Pojar's belief that progress on the Arab-Israeli conflict is necessary, and said the EU has an important role to play. He expressed concern that Iraqi troops may be unable to assume responsibility for the security of the country because of lack of training and equipment.

¶ 8. (C) Former FM Cyril Svoboda appreciated that the United States has not changed its goals in the region. Apologizing in advance for his "provocative question," however, Svoboda

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asked why the U.S. is changing its tactics in Iraq only now. He seemed to accept the argument that the surge in sectarian violence, which has intensified since August 2006, calls for a new political approach that will distance the Sunni insurgency from Al Qaeda and bring Shia militias under control. Svoboda also expressed concern about the possibility of Iraq splitting up. Jeffrey explained that the situation is different than the Balkans: governments in the region and most people in Iraq oppose dividing the country. It seems evident to all the major players that chaos would result if Iraq is divided, particularly because the unavoidably messy attempt to split up oil revenues would not provide a "velvet solution."

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RFE/RL and Radio Farda  
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¶ 9. (U) Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) officials briefed on the current status of its Persian-/Farsi-language broadcasts into Iran. Their current data shows that 13.5 per cent of Iranians over age 15 listen to Radio Farda despite jamming by Iranian authorities. RFE/RL also showcased the new RFE/RL website, launched just two weeks prior.

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Comment  
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¶ 10. (C) Comment. The Czechs clearly welcomed the opportunity to gain an insider's perspective on the ISG Report and the changing situation in Iraq. The USG can count on ongoing Czech cooperation in the Middle East, including support for the Radio Farda mission in Prague. End comment.

¶ 11. (U) This cable has been cleared by PDAS Jeffrey.

GRABER